DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 082 083 CG 008 196

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TITLE Sex Differences in the Longitudinal Prediction of Adult Personality.
PUB DATE Apr 73
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Society of Research in Child Development in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in April, 1973

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Adults; Birth Order; *Family Structure; Females; Identification (Psychological); Males; *Role Perception; *Sex Differences; Siblings; *Stereotypes

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with two sets of data-one that fails to find any long-term sex differences in adults, and another which seems to find such differences. The Berkeley Guidance Study offers longitudinal data in which no variables differentiate between the two sexes at all age levels. From these results, the authors conclude that the normal course of sex role development involves a gradual acquisition of individual sex role character which continues throughout the years and which is less fixed than usually assumed. A second study on family structure points to sex differences which have impact on family size, birth order, number of children, and spouse characteristics. The authors conclude that sex role research should concentrate less on sex stereotyped and justificatory mythology of sex role universals and more on specific research pertaining to the age and ecological relevance of the differences that do appear. (Author/LAA)

ED 082083

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Sex Differences in the Longitudinal Prediction of Adult Personality

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Paper Presented at the Society of Research in Child Development, Philadelphia. April, 1973.

In Western Society we appear to be possessed by the notion, I might say mythology, that because there are two sexes they, therefore, must always behave differently in transcendent ways. And yet, as John Money has so succinctly put it, apart from the fact that women gestate, lactate and menstruate while men only impregnate all other associations are largely probabilistic, not biological, not universal.

In this paper we shall deal with two orders of data, one that fails to find any important or long lived sex differences, and the other that seems to find them once more. The first data comes from a review of the subjects in the Berkeley Guidance and Oakland Growth studies of the Institute of Human Development, University of California. With the kind assistance of Jack Block, Paul Mussen and Marjorie Honzik, we have rescored this data in terms of sex differences and sibling position, so that we have been able to compare the responses of these subjects to the California Q sort as described by Block (1961) at three different age levels, Junior High School, Senior High School and 30 years of age. For the

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second source we have drawn a pool of 1000 college sophomores from Bowling Green University and had them respond to an inventory reporting their own sibling position, number of offspring in family, and the sibling positions of their own parents.

Berkeley Longitudinal Data on Sex Differences

(1) Let me begin with the longitudinal data on 57 females and 58 males from the Berkeley Guidance Study. When the 35 behavioral yearly ratings for each subject from ages four through sixteen are examined, the 442 tests of significance yield only 31 that are significant at the .05 level or better (that is 7%). More importantly, no variable differentiates between the sexes at all age levels, though a couple of variables distinguish across about four out of 12 age levels (boys have more speech problems and night restlessness).

If there are permanent behavioral differences between the sexes, we may ask, where are they?

(2) If we re-examine the Berkeley Growth Study by Sibling Position we do a little better, but not much. Contrasting the only child and the eight types of two child family (thus ten types in all), we found numbers of interesting differences at particular age levels, but very few differences that differentiated across all age levels. In fact, the only differences which remained constant at Junior High School, Senior High School and 30 years of age were several characteristics differentiating the only girl from other types of first born girls.

Thus the only girl at all ages was significantly more self-indulgent, testing of limits, and unable to delay gratification. But this was a small yield for the 94 possible personality traits that were considered. Now strictly speaking we are here considering birth order rather than sex differences, except that we would maintain that the present data shows that sex differences within sex (F1F vs. F) but between different birth orders also show little durability. Looking at this negative longitudinal data, one has the eerie feeling that something must be wrong. Where have all the sex differences gone? Perhaps the truth is that they have not gone, only that they were never there in the first place. There were few of them and we paid exaggerated attention to those we could find. At any given age level and in any given context, particular sex differences might well be evoked, and it is these that have been starred in the literature as if they were universals when they were in fact learned responses appropriate to time and place. On this view what is needed in research on sex role development is less attention to such 'essentialist' notions as sex role identification and more attention to the developmental and ecological reasons for the few sex differences in behavior that are to be found.

Even an investigator such as Money who more than anyone is sensitive to differences within and between sexes as well as to the malleability of sex role behavior, errs, we think, in placing too much attention on the early determination of sex role identification. The disadvantage in working with extreme cases as he does

is that he is dealing with subjects where the sex identity is felt to be in jeopardy because of incompleteness in the physiology of the sex organs. Both parents and counselors, therefore, put a great deal of effort into avoiding or resolving any dissonance between body biology and gender identity. This means that sex role identity is stamped in as soon as possible and with as little ambiguity as possible. There is an urgency about so doing. It is our suspicion that in the more normal case the child only gradually confirms his gender identity over a somewhat longer period. We need to remember Whiting's evidence on the shifts that can be brought about in gender identity as a result of initiation rites at adolescence. In the normal course of sex role development, therefore, we see a gradual acquisition of individual sex role character which continues throughout many years and is much less fixed than is usually argued, although like the rest of personality, the adopted role becomes increasingly stable as time passes.

Perhaps what we should concentrate on, even as psychologists, is the ideological reasons that we ourselves persist with our stereotypes and seek to maximize and generalize the few differences we do find. Thinking about sex differences seems to be governed more by sex role stereotypes than by evidence.

Family Structural Effects on Sex Role

But let me move now to some results from our recent research on family structural effects, which is a continuation of our earlier research recorded in our book, The Sibling (Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg, 1971). What we find in this recent study is a very strong indication

that in marriage choice and in the number of offspring they have, the two sexes seek to duplicate their family of origin. Furthermore, judging by the major trends in our data, it is the females who determine the number of children they will have, and somewhat less clearly the males who determine the spouses they will have. Which is about as sterotypic as you can get. But before we try to deal with the contrast between these results and those cited earlier, let me first give you some of the details.

The most important variable in this study of a thousand families and the birth orders of both parents and the children, has been family size. What we find is that: women from large families have many children women from small families have few children. More importantly, both men and women marry spouses from the same size family (small=1 or 2, large=4 or more), large marries large and small marries small, and when there is an exception, large marrying small, the number of offspring is small. That is, small dominates over large in offspring number.

Contributing significantly but with less power to these variances, birth order and sibling sex status make a host of contributions.

In two child families, for example, males from the all male family (M1M & M2) marry females with sisters (something they are not used to), while males who have sisters (M1F & F2, etc.) marry females who have brothers (something they are used to). First born males marry later born females (they are used to later borns), and later born males marry early born females (they are used to

early borns). Patterns of this sort are not quite so clear cut for the females but they tend in the same direction. Similarly, in the large family, a male with an older sister tends to marry an older sister or an early born female (something he is used to), whereas a male with an older brother tends to marry a later born female (something he is not used to).

Our speculative interpretation of some of these complexities, is that the male who has a sister knows what he is doing, he marries into the complementary position to which he has become accustomed. But males without sisters, while they marry appropriate birth orders, early marry late, late marry early, otherwise are somewhat confused and prefer females with sisters, presumably, we think, because females with sisters seem more feminine. Males with brothers, and, therefore, no practical experience with women, may well be forced to make more use of cultural stereotypes in making these blind choices. Not knowing women they choose the more feminine examples, that is, if having sisters does make you more feminine.

We also found that in the large family the female most likely to have a large family is a younger sister with older sisters (but not the female with older brothers). So we have the interesting result that the positions that fulfill the romantic stereotypes, males seeking feminine spouses and females having children, are those where the child has been afforded the least experience of the opposite sex. She who knows no older brothers has many children. He who has no sisters, marries a girl with sisters. Presumably

those who have grown up with members of the opposite sex, have a better understanding of what it's all about, and don't hear the drum of sex role stereotype so clearly. But those who are ignorant, when males, complement their masculine isolation with a salient femininity in the opposite sex, and when females, their feminine isolation with scads of children.

We admit that this is all very speculative. The significant interrelationships between family size, birth order, number of children and characteristics of the spouse, is, however, solid enough (replicating earlier work by Toman & Altus), and raises the question for us, as to why in this area of sex role identity we have such clear sex difference effects. Given the present variables, why do they predict so well in a distinctive fashion for each sex? Why does family size and birth order predict number of children for females, and why does family size and birth order predict spouse characteristics for males. It is an important question, because one can hardly argue that these sorts of life decisions (number of offspring and spouse characteristics) are not an important part of mature sex role identity. And yet as we have seen earlier, the Berkeley data on personality characteristics that differentiate between the sexes do not show much durability over time.

The answer is not an easy one. But a number of points can be made. First, in this data we are not dealing with effects over time. We are dealing mostly with certain choices made during the subjects' early maturity. Second, we notice that these choices tend to follow the relationships to which the subjects have become

accustomed throughout the previous 20-30 years. Family patterns are reproduced in the number of children and in spouse characteristics. That is, it is the particular family of origin that produces these outcomes, and life long experience in that family that gets generalized. We see here the individual showing durability in preference for the cluster of social relationships to which he has become accustomed. It is this social nexus that appears to explain these outcomes, rather than any enduring sex role differences. With the exception that for those subjects without experience of the opposite sex, sex role stereotypes appear to be a useful guide at this adult time of choice. From which we may, if we wish, draw implications about the relative importance of sex role stereotypes, the greater the ignorance of the subjects. Family structure is a more important determinant of these actions, except in those cases where it does not provide the relevant experience.

But still, why is it that it is the women's family characteristics that are mainly related to the number of offspring and the males' that are mainly related to spouse choice? These are most stereotypic outcomes. Yet in a way there is nothing mysterious about it. Given the current characteristics of society, each sex still bears the major responsibility and the major burden as indicated, the woman for the children she bears and the man for the wife he marries. There is nothing immutable about that.

Conclusion

We may conclude this paper with restatement that what is needed in sex role research, is less of the sex stereotyped and justificatory

mythology of sex role universals, and more specific research on the age and ecological relevance of the differences that do appear. In this light, the finding that enduring family structure effects the sex role choices of offspring and the choice made in marriage, is an illustration of such specific research. What endures here are the family effects. There are the most important determinants on that particular occasion, although, as we have seen, those without experience of the opposite sex seem periodically to be sustained by the mythology on sex stereotypes. Or at least, their choices do not have the simple stimulus generalization character of most of these findings.

A corollary of our findings, we feel, given the lack of durability of most sex differences and the non-rigidity of early determination (other than in exceptional cases), is that for the greater part the sexes are more malleable with respect to their differences than they are usually thought to be. Indeed, we may well wear the fairly rigid mask of sex stereotypes, because the evidence is so minimal. More thought on ourselves as human rather than as men or as women, will probably correct such defensiveness.